CHAPTER THREE
TSUKIHI UNDO

Orokamonogatari

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and *Orokamonogatari* afterword

NISIOISIN

Translated by »sawa«

EPUB edition

Tsukihi Undo and *Orokamonogatari* afterword

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First published as part of 愚物語 (*Orokamonogatari*) (Tokyo: Kodansha, October 2015) (pp. 229–287)

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http://kodansha-box.co.jp/topics/nishio/orokamono (website now defunct)

Translation and EPUB conversion by »sawa«

First edition 23 May 2020

This revision (v1.08) 21 July 2021

譯ヤクモノ物ガタリ語

'Translated tale'

A fan translation project.

Note

All names are given family name-first in kana spelling. Most honorifics are preserved.

Japanese is not italicised in general, except in notes.

This translation uses British English.

This translation uses a two-tier note system in addition to a glossary:

Untranslatable concepts and puns that would benefit from some immediate explanation, plus words that appear in the glossary will have notes ordered **numerically** with **square brackets**. (e.g. [2])

Decently-translated puns, references, trivia, in-depth explanations comparing the original Japanese with English etc. that are not necessary to understand the text but are of interest to the reader will be **underlined**.

001

Observational Report on Araragi Tsukihi, the Shide no Tori

No. 2761　Submitted by: Ononoki Yotsugi

In other words, me. It's meee~. Yay, peace peace.

The eternal aberration — the shide no tori — has (as of writing) taken the form of Araragi Tsukihi. Almost half a year has passed since the beginning of my observations. Subject has not transformed or acted in any significant manner.

Subject's appearance has been consistently Araragi Tsukihi; after all, the subject is only Araragi Tsukihi. The most one can say is on her frequently-changing hairstyle, but to extract meaning from this phenomenon would be in vain.

Plus, frankly, her behaviour also seems to suggest meaninglessness. She acts on impulse, her reckless actions a product of her own whimsy, always avoiding work she dislikes. This instinctual nature makes her creature-like, if not an exemplary one.

An oddity.

An aberration, a monster, an immortal.

Yet the subject acts like a creature — *is* a creature.

Such is her; such is her nature. Comprehensible as it may be, it remains unbelievable. One might even be led to think that this kid is an ordinary human being.

Despite this, her level of camouflage is such that even an expert's assistant such as myself can be fooled. The shide no tori is not to be underestimated.

I now know why Gaen-san let me stay in the Araragi household, even after the business in Kitashirahebi Shrine. Although her orders were to observe Araragi Koyomi and look out for his sister at times,

in reality one's priority should be less about the certified harmless Araragi Koyomi, but on minding his younger sister's potential dangers; such is the truth. An inability to perceive this would be my failing as a shikigami.

In retrospect, it can also be concluded that Araragi Tsukihi was the root cause of this town's numerous crises.

Whenever something happens in this town, one can say with certainty that it is related to Araragi Tsukihi — a girl at the centre of the vortex.

Amidst the flames waltzes the shide no tori.

The shide no tori itself harbours no ill will. However, for an immortal oddity to exist near the core, some irregularities are inevitable — and with it, negative effects.

Within his family, the development of Araragi Koyomi's personality — leaving aside his complex towards it — is most obviously affected by his youngest little sister.

This is not a question of good or bad.

This is beyond good and evil.

A far cry from being right or wrong.

For such an existence, a ridiculously ridiculous, non-existent existence, for her to wave the flag of justice is, from my perspective, quite ludicrous. At times, one has even almost forgotten one's duty, and thought of calling her out with a loud 'Oi, oi!'

If I dare venture in this Compliance Centre report, I would even say I myself am not suited for this job. However, Gaen-san regards this decision and arrangement as one done at the right place, with the right talent. I do not dispute that reasoning of hers.

An undying bird such as the shide no tori should be supervised by an immortal aberration. An oddity camouflaged as a human should be supervised by a man-made, formerly human oddity.

Most importantly, when the subject flaps its fiery wings and threatens to set everything ablaze, one must not cower or show mercy, nor can one fixate or be bedazzled; one must eliminate that shining bird. It takes a fearsome, unconscientious monster such as that to succeed in monitoring an undying bird.

002

Oni no onii-chan (abbr. oni-i-chan) takes good care of me, for he is a lolicon. As I carried out my mission this morning, he sneaked in a cup of ice cream for me like usual. Mm, I'm not complaining. Perhaps the reason behind his kindness is not because I am an oddity who looks like a young girl, but because I am an oddity made from a corpse. But anyway, for me, better a lolicon than a necrophiliac.

Having ice cream as a corpse? If someone were to ask me that, I would answer: yes and no, both. Not that I eat cold foods for preservation, or out of a corpse's instinct. This summer looks to be a scorcher, which worries oni no onii-chan, hence the ice cream, though there are some misconceptions on his part.

If you ask me whether I have an appetite, the answer is probably 'no'.

But it is very important for me, a humanoid oddity, to 'eat and sleep', to 'imitate humans'.

The moment I stop imitating, the moment I lose that human form.

Additionally, sweet foods work wonders for stress relief. Be it stress or relieving stress, it is still 'imitating humans', though with no end in sight for this surveillance job, it might be more necessary to relax a bit. And so I sat on the bed of my subject's, Araragi Tsukihi's room, enjoying my ice cream.

It is also worth mentioning that I moved into the Araragis since this February, when Araragi Tsukihi shared the room with Araragi Karen, one year her elder. However, the two separated when Araragi Karen entered high school on April.

Araragi Tsukihi aside, Araragi Karen's bestial instincts has nearly blown my cover several times (she also seems vaguely onto her sister's true identity). For an undercover agent like me, her independence is something I am very grateful for (although not part of my observational targets, I went to her room out of curiosity. A

punching bag dangles in the middle, making her room look like a boxer's — even though she does karate).

Well, Araragi Karen's character does share some aspects with my original owner, onee-chan Kagenui Yozuru; it is no wonder why I would be scared of her. Which is why, since separating on April (also marking the *de facto* dissolution of the Tsuganoki Second Middle School's Fire Sisters), my job has been made much easier.

If it was like then, even if the kind-hearted lolicon gave me ice cream, I would not have had the chance to savour it, or lick the cap.

One day, I'll hop over stateside and enjoy those Häagen-Dazs Cones that have since been retired from Japanese shelves… right as I, a corpse, dreamed such schemes, Araragi Tsukihi returned to her room.

'Ah, aah! I didn't feel like going to school for some reason so I did a U-turn and went back home and my plush is eating ice cream!?'

Even in shock, Araragi Tsukihi articulated the situation in a clear, simple fashion, though I must add here, she is excessively carefree.

What kind of school life is this, where you skip school just because you don't feel like it? Alas, the fault lies squarely on me as a professional. All my observations up till now have clearly indicated Araragi Tsukihi as exactly that kind of person.

Don't panic. My experiences are not for naught.

I quickly pretended to be a corpse — no, a plush, threw away the ice cream cup, and fell flat on the bed.

You didn't see anything.

If people heard that your plush moved on its own (while eating ice cream), people would probably think you are just a dreamy teenage girl. With hair ties down your partings and shoulder-length hair now, surely you'd know different hairstyles give different impressions?

'No, no, there's no use pretending to be a plush now, you were

totally moving! And licking the cup, too? Having some fun, are we? You've got ice cream on your cheek, that cup's right next to you, even the spoon's still in your hand. And can you not just throw that ice cream on the bed? My futon's full of ice cream now, geez…'

As she continued pursuing the matter and strode her way towards me, I flatly ignored Araragi Tsukihi. I am a plush. I do not hear, I do not speak.

Even as she grabbed and shook my shoulders, flipped my foot over, I gave no reaction — no sign of life whatsoever.

'D-did brother pour so much love into this plush that it grew a soul…? Like Pinocchio?'

Araragi Tsukihi said as she patted and slapped my cheeks. For one moment I wanted to pour out my murderous rage, but I kept it down. You could pour some love for once.

Well, my ultimate technique, "unlimited rulebook", does share some similarity with Pinocchio's growing nose.

'O—i, wakey wakey, you're not fooling anybody. How long are you going to keep your act up!? Hiding yourself and living here rent free, you're the worst!'

Says you.

— Was the retort that flashed in my head. Much as I wanted to say it impulsively like oni no onii-chan does, it was a beautiful opportunity I sadly had to take a pass on.

On the other hand, it would be easy to free myself from this situation. All I have to do is use the "unlimited rulebook", whack Araragi Tsukihi's brains out and make my escape — this was something I could do.

I ended up here in the first place precisely because this was something I could do.

This is something the expert Oshino Meme, the swindler Kaiki Deishuu, the violent onmyōji Kagenui Yozuru, and even their

superior Gaen Izuko could not do — only a monster such as myself is capable of it.

Even with their differences in skill, they had their hands tied behind their back by the child-like, sympathetic sincerity of Araragi Koyomi, and could no longer do anything about his sister. This is not a problem for a corpse doll like me, who has severed all emotion and sympathy long ago.

Unlike her half-vampire brother, Araragi Tsukihi has not been certified harmless. Anything suspicious from her will be met with swift, immediate action — such is the assignment given to me.

Ononoki Yotsugi is the tool for this exact task.

Maybe oni no onii-chan is not a lolicon and has noticed this as well, hence the ice cream as some bribe. But for me, those meant nothing.

I am only perplexed by these double meanings.

I do not bring any feelings into my work, and I am not going to be indecisive.

I could kill such beings anytime I want.

…Except now is not ‘anytime’.

Things have gone quite badly.

Araragi Tsukihi has ‘seen through’ my true identity here, meaning I as a pro have not done my job well.

To kill the shide no tori, not out of the job’s requirements, but to cover up my own failures, is completely forbidden, especially for pros like myself.

The expert would laugh at me.

The swindler would mock me.

The onmyōji would kill me (even though I am already dead).

And Gaen-san would… (shudders).

Therefore, in this situation, I can only completely pretend to be a plush. It is akin to an animated corpse playing dead; I feel I have lost a bit of my identity either way. Although for such a low-level affair, the “darkness” would probably not bother appearing…

‘Mmm…?’

No matter what was done to me (even examining my pupils, though ineffective for me who has the eyes of a dead fish), I remained motionless. Araragi Tsukihi’s suspicion eventually turned to confusion, as she placed me back on the bed.

‘Mmm? Mmm, mmm, mmm…’

Araragi Tsukihi shook her head as she sullenly left the room. It seems she has not accepted this, but has made up her mind about something…?

Judgements should not be made so hastily, but for now, I let out a sigh of relief — really, this third-year middle schooler is too difficult to read.

Just go to school like a normal kid.

Were I to call her out like that, ‘isn’t it fun to take U-turns though?’ would likely be her reply. It frustrates this corpse to no end.

That phoenix, ever since the Fire Sisters disbanded, has been going about her life solo, with increasing freedom over her own activities, making her ever impossible to predict.

Intelligence must be updated.

Raise her risk assessment.

Though I dodged a bullet this time, I should study better ways of hiding my identity… I started thinking of ideas with my grey brain cells (which might *really* be grey), though one may comment that this is premature.

By ‘premature’ I do not mean there are no risks to prepare for yet, but that it is premature to assume this crisis has already concluded.

Araragi Tsukihi soon returned to her room. For some reason, she held in her hand a metal mixing bowl — the sort one would use for mixing flour or whisking eggs in.

As I pondered over why she would come back with a bowl, Araragi Tsukihi splashed its contents toward me. Since I was pretending to be a plush, it was a splash I could not dodge from.

Though I should have.

From the scent alone.

From the sticky feeling on my skin.

Unbelievably, this bastard threw me an entire bowl of salad oil.

‘Chaka-chaka-light-a-fire～’

An odd tune came from the middle schooler as she took out a matchstick from her uniform. Why she would have matches in her skirt is unthinkable — from the kitchen, maybe, but she took them out like they were always there.

So… this is *very* bad.

This kid is being serious.

As a corpse, I lack any ‘senses’. No matter how she beats, kicks, or does things to my pupils, I can exhibit zero reaction.

For a dead being such as myself, once I play dead, nobody can tell the difference. This means I can fool even the experts. A corpse’s tsukumogami. But I cannot be burnt.

After all, as a corpse, to be burnt means I would disappear and *actually* go on to the next life. How could someone not in the field know the only way to deal with me so easily?

To confirm if their plush is alive by setting fire to her room… who

on earth does that?

Not even aberrations do that.

‘Ten, nine, eight, seven…’

The countdown has begun.

On her face, an exaggerated expression.

Maybe it’s an excitement towards seeing flames, though would that not be the mind of an arsonist?

In reality, if I were to be lit on fire drenched in salad oil, I would burn so brightly that the entire Araragi house would be reduced to ashes — in a worst-case scenario, maybe even the house next door.

A great fire.

What are you, Hienma Oshichi?

Wrong oddity for the shide no tori, no?

But in my half a year of observation, Araragi Tsukihi cannot be this stupid. The match, the countdown, it is all meant to be psychological. A ploy, a threat, forcing me to ‘move’, literally.

As easily riled children can be these days, burning one’s house down must surely be out of the equation… thus, to remain still and continue pretending to be a plush must be the correct choice.

It’s alright, if this were an ordinary human, it would be impossible to remain calm under such harrowing negotiation tactics, but a human I am not, and even within oddities, none exist with feelings and emotions —

‘Six, five…’

Except this inner calm has forced me to realise: at this moment, Araragi Tsukihi is not bluffing; her terror is genuine.

The real deal. *Seriously?*

Surely the kid's not treating this as a religious ceremony, right? This is technically one correct way to deal with a cursed doll… no, it'll be fine.

Even from their end, they must think they saw things wrong, or hoped they saw the wrong thing.

Threats such as these are like some esper in class worried about a wild guess such as 'I knew you were reading my mind!' from a middle schooler. It's the same threat — she *will* snuff out the match once only a second remains.

'Four… guhu, guhuhu'

Wait, what?

But how is the bastard going to snuff it out? Preparing a bowl of salad oil without the water to extinguish it… I bet she's the kind who never reads the safety instructions on fireworks.

Also, what is she laughing at?

What *is* that laugh?

'Three… ukekeke'

No female main character guffaws like that.

No, there is no way she has considered putting the fire out. Blissfully unaware of the consequences, diving headfirst into this game of chicken.

Hang on, wait a second.

She took a match out from her pocket, but that does not mean it is the only thing in there. A bit of water could extinguish that tiny flame, so maybe she has a small tube, a water reservoir hidden in her uniform?

Yes, that has to be it.

I almost fell for it.

Such is the eternal shide no tori, the brains of the former Fire Sisters, a being of dastardly cunning.

But you picked the wrong opponent, shide no tori.

I, too, have been used for many decades as a corpse's tsukumogami.

Such human tomfoolery does not work on m—

'Two… wah, hothothot!'

As I saw through her deception, Araragi Tsukihi threw away the match that, by that point, had started burning her fingers.

The countdown never finished.

As a match is lit, it shortens with time — common sense that seems to have eluded this generation of middle school girls. With that, whether she hid a method to put out the fire in her uniform will remain forever a mystery.

There was no chance to see it in action — the match was thrown in another direction, but oil evaporates and exhibits capillary action. A burning match landing on the carpet would still spell doom.

A small fire would become a big one.

I quickly picked up the spilt ice cream cup on the futon (which still had some ice cream on), and leapt from my position with the bed's springs.

Like netting a dragonfly, I caught the match with the ice cream cup. Just as planned, the half-melted ice cream put a stop to that flame.

Thank goodness it wasn't a cone.

For otherwise it would have been a waste. Once I put out the fire, I finished what was left of the ice cream, together with the matchstick, before landing.

As my skirt flapped gently, I thought I had landed quite gracefully — although because of the oily socks, I slipped and tumbled over

right on the spot.

‘I… I knew it! The plush moved on its own! I saw it with my own two eyes! What the, it’s super scary! Aaaaah!!’

Witnessing my state of disgrace, Araragi Tsukihi let out a blood-curdling scream. All together with me now, ready, set,

No, *you’re* scarier.

003

‘Eeh!? So Ononoki-chan’s a magical girl of justice who came from another dimension to fight against magical beings, but the dimensional barrier only allowed souls to pass through, and you still needed a body for combat, and only then did you possess my plush!?’ [1]

As I thought, Araragi Tsukihi took every word of my explanation in.

An explanation wrung from pure desperation.

Gaen-san once said to me that I cannot let Araragi Tsukihi or her family (except oni no onii-chan) know of my true identity, that is to say, my identity as a specialist’s assistant. Which means, as long as she is mistaken, then I’m still technically safe, right? Such is my reasoning.

The same kind of contrived reasoning that goes ‘you’re technically not out if you get struck in the head in dodgeball’.

Though if I did claim to be some other monster that I’m not, I might *actually* face the “darkness”’s wrath, which was why I went with a magical girl.

The original idea was to take inspiration from oni no onii-chan’s favourite anime, the *Pretty Cure Series*, which I am otherwise unfamiliar with, so I made up some generic backstory that involves interdimensional travel and possession, which seems to have already captured Araragi Tsukihi’s imagination — the girl who, just moments ago, saw me as a monster (*I* should be the one who sees you as a monster — but then again, there’s nothing wrong with either of us seeing each other as monsters), now looked at me with twinkly-eyed anticipation.

‘Magical girl’ is already neat, but topping it off with ‘of justice’ has sealed the deal — even in a post-Fire Sisters era, her sense of justice still burns strong.

Even though she’s the one causing all the trouble. And some trouble

that is.

‘A-and then? What are the magical creatures you defeat like?’

‘Er, um… well, it can’t be summed up in one word.’

My imagination has not gone this far yet.

Sorry to disappoint, but my creativity is insufficient for responding to your expectant queries.

‘That’s alright, if you can’t sum it up in one, I’ll give you a hundred! Tsukihi-chan will listen to someone seriously for the first time in her life!’

So you have never taken anyone seriously… how did you manage to make it through these fifteen years? This kid’s family might be more to blame here…

‘…It’s a creature who attracts evil without themselves noticing. That creature pulls in disasters like a magnet. I must stop them before disaster envelops this town.’

‘Aah — that’s really evil —’

I have actually modelled it after this third-year middle schooler in front of me, but I will keep that to myself. She seems impressed.

So, it appears the crisis has finally passed. It is time to wrap this up. If I get myself stuck in exposition, it would be tricky. Foreshadowing and pay-off is oni no onii-chan’s specialty.

‘Well, I’ll have to head towards battle now. Worry not, once I am done my soul will automatically return to my home dimension. This body — no, this doll will revert to its original state and be back in your room.’

I cannot abandon my assignment, so I rounded things off like this for now. Phew, though this was unexpected, at least I have avoided the worst possible outcome.

I say that, but now is not the time to relax. I need to maintain my

aura of seriousness and leap out from the window. I wanted to let Araragi Tsukihi witness me fly out as a magical girl (when I say 'fly', I mean a simple jump). Consider it a little something for the fans.

'So pray for my victory. For this world, and for your loved ones.'

I think this is what one says when bidding farewell? I continued acting the warrior magical girl, as I bent my knees.

'Unlimited —'

'Now hol'n a sec!'

Just as I was about to summon my technique, she interrupted with a strange tone and went for my kneecaps.

Is this kid for real?

Even without knowing what the "unlimited rulebook" is, to attack someone in the kneecaps just as they are about to fly… any bit of thought would reveal how dangerous this was, surely?

Fortunately, she did so right before my body was about to expand, so everything was fine. One small misstep, however, and the entire upper floor of the Araragi house could have been wiped out.

'W-what is it, Tsukihi-kun?'

So generic was the warrior magical girl setting, I completely changed my tone of voice. Not that my character was specific in the first place, though it did acquire some quirks over time, and now, paired with a middle school girl in her room, I think it contrasts nicely.

'Hu-hu-hu, did you think I would do nothing after hearing all that?'

Yes, do nothing, *please*.

The anger seems to have eluded her, perhaps due to my lack of intonation as a corpse, as a doll. If anything, Araragi Tsukihi lightly rapped her chest, and gave me a smug look.

‘How could I sit still in face of such a terrifying creature! We’ll defeat it! I’ll help!’

‘Eh…?’

‘Let’s do this together!’

‘Eh? Ehh…?’

What’s going on?

Are we seriously continuing this?

I thought this was a short story?

There is no need for this, just talk about some book we like and finish it off like usual.

‘…Nay, a humble servant such as myself dare not inconvenience the common folk residing in this world.’

This unexpected development caused some mild panic, which in turn made me sound less like an otherworldly magical girl, and more like a drifting samurai. Not that Araragi Tsukihi minded at all.

It seems she still has not taken any person seriously ever — which is fair play; I am no human, I am an aberration.

Wait, no, I am a magical girl of justice.

‘It’s something I have to face on my own, so —’

‘None of this “on your own” business! This is my world, and I’m protecting it! To even say it’ll be inconvenient, that’s impossible!’

Maybe I am reading too much into it, but from a certain viewpoint, it sounded like she was declaring ownership over the entire world.

‘Consider it fate that it was *my* doll you possessed; so, no worries, Ononoki-chan! It’s too late for you to stop me anyway, I’m rearing to go! Even if you say no, I will cling onto you like a persistent salesperson!

‘I’ll have you know, this world has its warriors of justice too!’

Araragi Tsukihi said, as if waiting to say this line the whole time.

‘For I am justice herself! Heh-heh-heh!’

You’re *not* justice.

You’re a disaster.

To this world, and to me — was what I wanted to say, but I held it in, and gave it some thought. As a professional, as a new member of the Araragi family, and as a rookie magical girl.

Right then, you look ready, Araragi Tsukihi. Let us see what you are made of — I guess even your brother would not know the answer to that.

004

Whether oni no onii-chan could be considered Araragi Tsukihi's real brother is something not even the experts can agree on, but if this situation were to continue, I would probably be sentenced (which is what I originally meant), so I shall have to lie even further just to make it out of here alive. [2]

I may have said that I am not careless, but I probably really am — me covered in salad oil does not help; I have really let go. I thought with a title like *Orokamonogatari* (‘*Fool's Tale*’) that it would be a light comedy along the lines of ‘slightly silly girls frolicking about!’, but we ended up with some properly problematic girls from start to finish.

It might be too late for saying this, but oni no onii-chan did a really great job under such environments. However, every cloud has a silver lining; I've got an idea. Speaking of problematic girls, there remains one around Araragi Tsukihi who has yet to make an appearance.

I shall ask for her assistance.

‘So if you don't want to be killed, then help me out, Sengoku Nadeko.’

‘H-hyehhh!?’

It took me one minute to go from Araragi Tsukihi's room in the Araragi household to Sengoku Nadeko's room in the Sengoku household (they live close to each other).

The magical girl of justice made her entrance via the window, carelessly left open. Sengoku Nadeko, scribbling at her desk, tumbled over backwards with her chair, her feet now facing the ceiling.

Everything from her feels like an act…

However, unlike before, Sengoku Nadeko now wore short hair and

had jeans for pyjamas, making that fall less lovable than it was — something she would probably be happy to know.

Upon closer inspection, she was not writing, but drawing. A sheaf of manga genkō yōshi lay on her desk. [3]

Oh yeah.

She wanted to be a manga artist.

I cannot tell if it is any good from a single page, but how should I put it, it's all girly-girly, very shoujo… honestly, not my cup of tea.

After that, Araragi Tsukihi set off for school once again — but not before much nagging from me. After all, the battle would not happen until nightfall, and isn't it more in-character for a warrior of justice to attend school — was the logic behind my persuasion, which she surprisingly accepted on the spot. She replied, 'okay, then I'll see you after school!' and made her way, a spring in her step.

Whilst not a solution to anything, at least she is no longer with me, which is a great relief — communication with this girl is legitimately draining.

But now that I am thinking of possible endings, the most ideal one would be me insisting 'oh, the creature showed up without warning while you were in school, and I defeated it', return to being a doll, and turn everything back to normal. But she will not accept that.

I know she wouldn't.

She cares not about justice at this point. All she wants is to see 'a doll battling a creature', an anime-esque, unreal scene like that. Fantasy does seem to have made a comeback in recent years, although I was not expecting such praise for my story out of thin air.

If she realised *she* was the unreal existence, how would she even react? — keeping that a secret is also part of my duties.

Therefore, for things to end 'without her knowing' would probably

be unacceptable for Araragi Tsukihi — that'd be no good.

An accidental foreshadowing should be paid off — if without her participation, at least with her witnessing it, otherwise she would not let go. Therefore, I have to defeat the creature as a magical girl of justice.

…Why are 'magical' girls the ones who defeat 'magical' creatures anyway? Isn't this fratricide? I mulled over the contradictions in my backstory, though it is something I can no longer back-track on. Someone must play the 'magical creature' now.

The first thing I had in mind for the role was the former Kissshot — the Aberration Slayer, Kissshot Acerolaorion Heartunderblade. Currently known as Oshino Shinobu.

The girl with the golden hair.

Who might not look a monster herself, but she could probably materialise one with her powers, as a temporary prop.

The problem is, she and I have a lot of history, although that vampire's personality is not all that vile. If I put on a friendly face, she might still grant her rival's request, but all this is simply my own conjecture.

Which is a path I abandoned soon after. The vampire aside, if word got to her cohabitant, oni no onii-chan, then that would spell great misery.

If that lolicon-plus-siscon did some digging and found out I was there to monitor his sister, that would be bad. He would defend his sister as a siscon, and abuse me as a lolicon.

And along the same lines, I have to rule out not only the former Kissshot, but everyone around oni no onii-chan's network. I thought about letting her shadow my work as a specialist, then lie and claim that I am getting rid of those magical creatures; but with a new goddess installed in this town, it has become extraordinarily peaceful, without any extraordinary aberrations showing up. No longer extraordinary, but ordinary.

This amount of quiet means that Araragi Tsukihi is almost certainly the only concern in this town.

Which also means no magical creatures.

I have also thought of putting on a solo act — say there is a monster that cannot be seen by idiots, and put on a show for her. But then I thought of the perfect candidate — Sengoku Nadeko.

Araragi Tsukihi's childhood playmate, who was once bitten by a snake and got coiled up — in other words, had experience with aberrations, to put it briefly.

She is also one of the very few girls whom Araragi Koyomi has cut off. That makes her the best possible guest star in this production.

Having decided upon this, I visited the Sengoku household, this time with a proper "unlimited rulebook".

It should be noted that Sengoku Nadeko is the same age as Araragi Tsukihi; in other words, she is also a third-year middle schooler, except she never goes to school now (a fact I noticed as part of observing Araragi Tsukihi), so it is no surprise that she's inside her room all the time.

It does seem, however, that a magical girl of justice flying in through her window is something beyond her expectations. As she tumbled over with her chair in front of an intruder, she seems a messy state.

But ultimately, she is immune to such aberrations, or should I say, resistant to them.

'N-no, you're *definitely* not some magical girl, right? You're some oddity, aren't you?'

Even gripped with fear, she made a verbal comeback.

'A-an oil monster?'

Nm.

It is already dry at this point, so I went without changing my clothes, but it seems the scent of salad oil remained… it may be more accurate to say it has soaked through than to say it has dried.

‘Y-you did say you were “of justice”… so someone to do with Tsukihi-chan?’

She is surprisingly perceptive.

Though from her perspective, to happen upon a sudden disaster of unknown origin leaves little candidates for explanation, save for her unscrupulous childhood playmate.

I say candidates, it feels more like an arrest for her (‘candidate’ (候補) and ‘arrest’ (逮捕) have similar-looking kanji, I mentioned it as mere wordplay).

Though their relationship went on pause for a while, at least Araragi Tsukihi was no blank slate for her since primary school — which saves a lot of explanation for me, thank god.

When push comes to shove, I could still coerce her to help me out, but it seems we share some common ground on Araragi Tsukihi, and under the principle of ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’, we could co-operate at least temporarily.

I wish it were that simple.

‘Ahh, that sounds like Tsukihi-chan.’

Sengoku Nadeko nodded, unfazed at my explanation.

Oh? How unreactive.

A difference in temperature.

A disagreement over how big the problem is.

Perhaps I have numbed her senses through that magnificent entrance.

Of course, I did not tell her everything straight away — what she

does not know about the shide no tori, I kept it from her. It is the mark of a pro.

Confidentiality.

I maintained that I sneaked into the Araragi house to monitor Araragi Koyomi and Oshino Shinobu, though I needed her help because Araragi Tsukihi might be about to see through my 'act'.

She became pensive at the mention of the two vampires, but the damage seemed less severe than I thought (which meant my plan to weaken her and gain the psychological high ground had failed).

Seems like she has let go of it more than I thought?

If so, it could be thanks to Araragi Tsukihi. After Sengoku Nadeko returned from the mountains, Araragi Tsukihi visited her place often.

So frequent were her visits, I even spotted a cushion just for her — how unabashed.

'Alright, understood. I'll help.'

Originally expecting this incongruity in awareness to be a big hurdle in our exchange, Sengoku Nadeko responded with an unexpectedly crisp agreement.

To that end, speaking of why I ended up in the Araragi household, Sengoku Nadeko eviscerating oni no onii-chan over and over at the mountaintop was another distant cause. Originally wanting to pursue this as part of negotiating with her, I felt a bit let down by this wasted opportunity.

But maybe some of it came through (though as a corpse, it would not have been via my face), because Sengoku Nadeko followed with:

'In the end, it's for Tsukihi-chan too.'

Aw, how cute.

This unwitting cuteness was also where her complex first arose, and subsequently, everything that happened last year, but seeing her like this, I cannot blame her. After all, one's eyes gradually gravitate towards her appearance, drowning out what she is saying.

No amount of words could rival 'cute'.

As a monster, I could separate 'cute' from all other sorts of impressions, though humans would probably lump them all together — ultimately, no one was able to see this girl for who she is.

Even now, when she says it's for Tsukihi-chan, who knows what she is actually thinking — she isn't seeing this as material for her manga, right?

Well, I do hope she does not lose her tenacity as a human. At least compared to when she was stripped of everything but 'cute', she is on good track.

A good track, from where I'm looking.

Though similarly 'a human turned oddity', the process was irreversible for me, so I cannot help but express support for survivors like Araragi Koyomi or Sengoku Nadeko.

But I will still kill if the situation calls for it.

The same goes for Sengoku Nadeko; though she is not a subject of surveillance, she is someone to be alert around, so it would be advisable if I checked in on her 'from time to time' alongside my current duties.

'But I, what can I do? I'm, no longer, a serpent god… — Tsukihi-chan, what can I do to help her?'

What can I do to help her.

If Oshino no onii-chan heard such selflessness, I wonder what he would say… seems like she's let go of those fangs.

Not her own, but the serpent's.

That said, however brief, her experience being a goddess helped her accept my request with such frictionless ease. Seems in this world, ‘happiness’ means different things to different people.

‘Oh, and I — I haven’t been outside much. If I’m in the sun for too long, I’ll probably faint…’

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is a bit *too* weak…

It appears she has essentially become a hikikomori. Although my primary observational target is Araragi Tsukihi, leaving me little room to see how world-weary Sengoku Nadeko is, in a way, it’s quite worrying; is she doing alright?

‘…Anyway, isn’t it about time you headed to school? Don’t worry, nobody is going to mind you.’

Against my typical nature, I suggested this for her (a human’s) sake, but it seems I went too far. I should not say things beyond my comfort zone.

‘Mm. The class too, they seem to be getting along now. I’ve heard it from Tsukihi-chan.’

Sengoku Nadeko replied with a semi-answer — though I did not know that a girl like Araragi Tsukihi would conduct an investigation like that. Finding out how other schools are doing internally seems a challenging task…

‘But, well… I’ve, now, got something that needs doing. For me, it’s even necessary, I think.’

Sengoku Nadeko spoke as she finally got up. She righted that fallen chair, and put her hand on her desk — the desk with the manga genkō yōshi.

By ‘something that needs doing’, did she mean drawing manga?

Hmm.

Is it so important that she has to take leave from school? I can’t help but think that if this continues, this girl would probably never

make it to high school — but then again, if I told her to stop, she would take it on as just 'someone else's advice', born from logic and rationality.

Speaking of, maybe it's because I was still on the ground, but when Sengoku Nadeko stood up, I can't help but think 'Eh?'

Has she grown taller?

To put it in manga terms, the background just clashes with the perspective… when she was a god in that shrine, she felt a bit, erm, smaller, tinier… ah, that's it.

Puberty, isn't it?

Her being alive means she grows.

I see.

But it does feel quite abrupt. Maybe it is a result of discarding those shackles known as her 'cuteness', finally enabling her body to grow — I analysed coldly.

Araragi Karen aside, she might end up taller than oni no onii-chan someday.

If being a hikikomori means Sengoku Nadeko's healthy growth, it would be plenty ironic… then I guess there's no reason to force herself to school.

I never went, but from what I have heard, there are not many other places with that high a stress level.

Yet despite this, everything looks very orderly and neatly divided; oh yeah, it's a lot like those.

Like the battery cages you get for chickens.

No wonder they produce freaks — there is no need to force oneself to go there and leave bad memories.

'Obviously, to help Tsukihi-chan is something I want to do too. So,

what should I do?'

'Ahh, mm… yes, I do remember, you no longer have the serpent god inside you.'

I spoke my mind.

This kid is considerably limited in her intellectual faculties, so I have to make it as clear and simple as I can for her.

'But don't you still have other oddities living in you?'

'? …Really?'

Sengoku Nadeko tilted her head in bewilderment.

Did she forget? No, did she not realise?

In that case, Kaiki no onii-chan has done a superb job — as expected of a swindler.

'The slug.'

'Eh?'

'Slug Tofu — the aberration Kaiki Deishuu put on you to remove the serpent god. I'm going to go ahead and do a little recycling.'

005

Technically, the *main portion* (as it were) of the Slug Tofu had left Sengoku Nadeko a long time ago — it is not a particularly strong or persistent aberration.

In order to give a her a smooth, uninterrupted life, the swindler had given the middle schooler some palliative care, inserting a fake aberration into her, the oddity itself a very vague one.

When Sengoku Nadeko returned from the mountains, the oddity would have been almost completely detoxed by the time she left hospital — but, there will still be scraps left.

Scraps.

To put it more literally — an afterimage.

The same as when the swindler planted the Cinderswarm Bee onto Araragi Karen; it still resides within her memory and spirit, a natural aftereffect.

Having said that, it was also possible to seek help from Araragi Karen, but given that she is stuck between an immortal brother and an immortal sister, trying to live as a normal human being… she already has enough on her plate, so I decided to leave her be.

In the hopes of having her continue this miracle of miracles.

Besides, even if Araragi Tsukihi narrowly missed my true identity, I am not risking it again with Araragi Karen — who knows what would happen to this undercover investigation.

It will be Sengoku Nadeko who helps me return things to normal.

‘To experience being an oddity… no, to rehabilitate from being a goddess, made its use necessary, but you have no need for it now, don’t you? You can give me that afterimage. I’ll pretend it’s a monster and deal with it in front of Araragi Tsukihi. It fits the role perfectly.’

The Slug Tofu is no immortal aberration, and therefore falls outside of my expertise. But given that it is scraps, I could handle it either way. Not to sound all greedy, but clean-ups such as this would cost you if done by a specialist, though I am cleaning up after Kaiki no onii-chan, so I guess it is some coincidence.

To wit, the bee's stinger planted on Araragi Karen might have to be cleaned up by me some day. I've only thought about this just now, but given her situation, that stinger might have helped her from experiencing oddity-related anaphylactic shock. If you look at it that way, then it might be better if I didn't do anything…

'O-okay… I — I see. Kaiki-san has…'

Sengoku Nadeko's expression became complex.

Scraps may be scraps, but for someone to have bits of oddities still inside them, I expected a more uncomfortable reaction, but that does not seem to be the case.

'Kaiki-san, has he been doing well?'

She asked that out of line question.

I say out of line, she might have asked it to get it out of mind.

So she really has let go of her fangs.

How much does she know that it was the swindler's deception? Then again, she might have fell for it willingly, despite knowing everything; such an attitude cannot be discounted.

'He's doing fine', I lied.

I have never seen that sickly, ill-fated man doing fine — the most I can say is he's doing richly.

'So how do we… take it out? For something like this… I remember we had to do some ceremony? All I need to do is change into a school swimsuit?'

I have no idea where that misunderstanding came from, but from

Sengoku Nadeko's response, I can tell she has had at least a bit of experience. Come to think of it, to endure two exorcisms within half a year, this kid has had a rough life.

'We can skip that… there's not much time left.'

'S-skip it?'

'One thing that separates me from Oshino no onii-chan is our attention to detail. I'm less strict about things. More of an ends-justify-means type of person…'

Such a forceful approach came from another specialist, the violent onmyōji Kagenui Yozuru, but there is no time for details. If I did leak out the part where onee-chan and I are experts in dealing with immortal aberrations, that'd be another rabbit hole.

It is incredible that Sengoku Nadeko sees Araragi Tsukihi as a valued friend. If she knows that I in fact sneaked into the Araragis in order to kill Araragi Tsukihi if necessary, it would be a source of great friction.

So I kept my mouth shut, stood next to Sengoku Nadeko, and took out a single sheet of plain genkō yōshi from the shelf onto her desk.

'I say that, but we should do the bare minimum… could you draw on this?'

'Mm? Draw…'

'You're good at drawing, right? Then please draw a slug here. It's all slippery and slimy, so it's really simple, no?'

'N-no, isn't that difficult? Because it's slippery and slimy?'

My request has been met with reluctance from Sengoku Nadeko — seems primitive organisms prove to be the hardest to draw.

'And, besides, why am I drawing a manga with a slug as the main character? It's too novel a concept…'

'There's no need to draw a manga. You can think of it as character

design.'

'Character design…'

'If you can't draw it, then I can do it, but it would be more effective if it was the person afflicted who drew it. After a certain process, what's left of the Slug Tofu would transfer from your body to this genkō yōshi sheet.'

'…Like how the snake god aberration was sealed inside a talisman?'

'Something… like that.'

It is in fact completely different, but for an outsider's understanding, I'll give her a pass. That god's source and origin are partially taboos, so explaining it would get complicated quickly.

'Understood. Then, Ononoki-chan, wait here. I'll draw it.'

Once she said that, she sat on her chair, and picked up her pencil — is she sketching this from scratch? Quality is not that big of a concern, to be honest; a couple lines, that'll do…

Then again, for a creator, 'that'll do' is probably something prohibitively inconceivable. With that thought, I stood next to her as she finished her drawing.

It's not a bad thing to be invested… I say that, but watching someone else's creative process and waiting gets boring really fast.

The silence is embarrassing too.

This kid has matured a lot since then (not on the outside, but inside), she wouldn't be secretly mocking me for making a mistake in my work, right? — these paranoid thoughts started entering my mind. If she gets the impression that I would cover up my mistakes by enlisting a layperson, then that's simply too bad.

I am a professional, conducting a foolproof plan for keeping a secret — well, there's no point in reading too much into this girl, that I do know very well.

In order to stop overthinking, I decided to ask some questions I am not personally interested in.

‘You use a spoon nib pen and pretend to look the part, but have you submitted your work to a publisher or a competition? I’ve heard for those who debuted early, they would have their own editor by their teens.’

‘Hm? Ahh, well, this, you can make it even with a sign pen. Even among the pros, you’d hear quite a number of them go “how long are we still going to be stuck with something as ancient as ink” or something like that.’

She replied with a non-answer.

So concentrated was she, that she may not be listening in the first place — turns out Araragi Tsukihi is not the only middle schooler who does not listen to people.

‘If it’s digital, then, it’s not that big a deal… but, the search for better gear would add to that initial investment… um, what were you asking?’

‘Whether you’ve submitted your work. Though recently, there’s been more people who self-publish… same for you?’

‘Oh, no. I’m absolutely not in that… territory.’

You don’t say?

‘I tried submitting to a publisher, but these days, it seems to have little effect. I also released it anonymously on the internet, but it wasn’t ideal either…’

‘Mm hmm…’

It was originally asked on a whim; but to submit on the internet, let alone publishers, shows massive improvement for someone whose social skills were previously abysmal.

‘You have a PC though. I thought you said it would be expensive.’

‘Ah, it’s not that, you can go on the internet with even consoles these days. In terms of specs, compared to a regular PC, you could probably go further with a console… it’s just the thought of digitising, I can’t see myself doing it…’

‘……?’

I couldn’t keep up.

Luckily, the slug is about finished. I ended the topic by saying ‘well, you can’t always get what you want’; seeing as I started this conversation, to end it is only my responsibility too.

‘Mm, indeed.’

Sengoku Nadeko put down her nib pen, and made her way to the screentones. *Screentones*, for fuck’s sake.

If I left her to her devices, she might even take her sweet time to fill in the background, as she cut up that 61 screentone with a cutter.

‘I —’

She said.

‘— Can’t always get what I want, and that makes me happy.’

Said the one who has always had life her way, the sweet girl sweeter than candied fruit.

006

The duel between the magical girl of justice and the slug monster is to take place at Rouhaku/Namishiro Park — for no reason in particular; it just happens to be the only fitting place I can think of.

There is one other empty, open space: Kitashirahebi Shrine. However, the god residing there has a near-telepathic relationship with oni no onii-chan, who might report my deeds to him.

Really, new guys (new gods?) are so inflexible and difficult to please. [4] She would be wise to deal with such matters more gently, for the sake of this town's community — is the advice I have for her.

Well, a sparsely-equipped playground at night makes for an impeccable stage. While unnecessary, a barrier ought to be set up, just in case.

If I set up the stage in front of Araragi Tsukihi, then it would satisfy her curiosity to a certain extent.

Speaking of Araragi Tsukihi, she seems to have the wrong idea about acting as support for the magical girl of justice — she showed up with a black hakama, straight from kyūdō. [5][6]

She does wear a kimono all the time (the weirdo joined the chadō club just because she likes them), but a hakama… does she think of herself as a warring bishoujo? [7]

Her walking around like that at night makes her less a bishoujo and more a suspicious person.

But upon further inquiry, it turns out she borrowed it not from kyūdō, but from the naginata club. [8]

Private schools, covering even the rare activities, huh.

The problem is, she not only borrowed the wear, but the gear as well — and it is not the bamboo analogues they use in clubs, but a

real, bladed naginata.

‘Ononoki-chan, I’m ready as your support! I’ll protect myself, so Ononoki-chan, no need to worry about me, you can battle as you please!’

Salad oil was already menacing enough in Araragi Tsukihi’s hands, but for her to wield a naginata, one of the strongest bladed weapons known to man — even I, someone well-experienced in combat, am left utterly speechless.

I’m worried all right.

You say you’ll protect yourself, but it’s making me want to protect myself from you.

Although this situation was born from my carelessness, if one thinks about it, this could be an excellent opportunity to communicate directly with Araragi Tsukihi, or, in other words, an exciting chance to probe at her mind, but honestly, I am not interested in studying this kid in-depth.

Seriously, while I do have big flaws in my personality (which I am acutely aware of), it is no wonder Gaen-san inserted me as a spy. If one cannot separate their job from their patience, monitoring Araragi Tsukihi would be impossible.

‘…Have you brought the things I’ve asked you to?’

I say all that, but I haven’t completely given up on caring, even though I could — let’s just get this over with. With that thought, I said nothing more about her equipment, and sped towards Namishiro/Rouhaku Park, setting things up as fast as I can.

‘I’ve got it~ from the kitchen~ there’s enough at home, so I’ve brought enough for myself and Ononoki-chan~. But what’s this salt for, exactly?’

As she asked incredulously, Araragi Tsukihi took out two salt bottles from her pocket. It appears she has taken my bluff as a foreign fantasy, so despite wearing Japanese clothes, she has no idea that the salt is for exorcising.

‘My investigations suggest that the monster is hiding somewhere in this park. But the monster will react with salt, so if you could kindly sprinkle some salt around areas you find suspicious, that’d be great.’

Even if that’s not the actual case, it is a slug.

It will react against salt.

Much as a woman in naginata clothes sprinkling salt in a park in the middle of the night is beyond suspicious, for her to at least have some ‘sense of participation’ is an important procedure.

Cumbersome as it may be, unlike extracting Sengoku Nadeko’s Slug Tofu, it is a step that cannot be skipped — I heard that recent entertainment shows have emphasised this ‘sense of participation’; perhaps in the future, we specialists have to do the same, placing performance above all.

Not a trend I can get behind.

‘Then I’ll start from the swings over there, and you’d better… you could start from the sandpit.’

‘Roger that~ ahaha, scattering salt on a sandpit, I feel like a sumo wrestler~’

Araragi Tsukihi responded animatedly, as she earnestly made her way to the sandpit and the slide.

But she could have said ‘no, I want to do the swings!’ for no reason at all. In any case, I cannot predict any of her reactions, so it’s nice that she ended up doing as I said.

Speaking of sending Araragi Tsukihi to the sandpit, the reason I did so is because during the day, I already hid Sengoku Nadeko’s slug illustration in the pit.

It accelerates the action a bit, and the sooner she finds the ‘otherworldly monster’, the better.

No matter if she’s holding a naginata or some salad oil, I will not let any layperson take care of any monsters, but having her witness me

setting up a barrier and discovering the monster by sprinkling the salt herself, she should already have a great ‘sense of participation’. All that needs to be done (before Araragi Tsukihi needlessly butts in) is to finish the Slug Tofu.

After that, the magical girl of justice will return to her home dimension, and Araragi Tsukihi will be left with her original mute plush.

As far as improvisation goes, it’s a decent story.

Though I said I would start with the swings, to do so would be a waste of salt (and probably seen as a prank in poor taste), so I quietly tailed Araragi Tsukihi.

She may have said she would do it, but I don’t trust that she would actually scatter the salt on the sand. She (to take an extreme example) could just open the cap and drink the salt for no reason.

In reality, under my watch, Araragi Tsukihi did a weird thing — not opening the cap, but first sprinkling the salt on her palms. I was dumbfounded by her actions, but she was probably only wanting to ‘feel like a sumo wrestler’, as she threw salt into the sand.

Really, I thought for a moment something would happen, but it seems that things will end smoothly — my fixes for a careless mistake have overcome their biggest hurdle.

Sengoku Nadeko’s drawing in the sand — which, after she finished the background, she started drawing scenes, so I semi-forcefully took it away — reacts chemically, no, reacts monstrously with the salt, and once that happens, I will defeat it immediately, and end with a round of applause.

…Not that I’m saying this out of relief, but right then, I suddenly understood Sengoku Nadeko’s words.

I can’t always get what I want, and that makes me happy.

When I first heard it, I thought she was just bluffing — that maybe her meek looks hide a super masochistic pervert, which would be a bit off-putting.

But, while I am not completely ruling out such tastes, I only realised just now that she said it from a completely different place than I thought.

Yes, that.

‘Human values’ is what it’s probably called.

Some say one cannot give it their all if they are not happy, but just as an airplane requires some headwind to take off, an overly saccharine life filled only with ups will lead one to question if they are really alive, or if all this was just a dream.

As prosperous one’s life may be — be it being born with a silver spoon, or being born with unrivalled talent, intellect, or physique, people still live on with their dissatisfactions, their anxieties, not out of greed, but maybe because only with these complaints, these insecurities, can one feel truly alive.

And therefore — pursue human values.

Looking to inject a little difficulty into their livelihoods.

‘……’

Eh.

I might be spoiling the view by saying this, but I died a long time ago, so none of it matters to me.

Words like values or lifestyles, to me, just feel like they come from a difficult book. If you rattled them out onto a list, I could never take it to heart. Haven’t got one.

…What about Araragi Tsukihi?

That girl may lack self-awareness, but this is an immortal aberration, an eternal undying bird, changing from one person to another, continuing from one person to another, probably until humanity’s end; the only aberration to possess such eternity — the phoenix.

I lived once.

I no longer have memories of that time, but I know I lived once — meaning I know the difference between what it is to be dead, and what it is to be alive.

The latter like a dream, the former nothing much really.

Oni no onii-chan knows that.

The former Kissshot knows that.

But what about the undying bird?

For a being who only lives, who has nothing but life, do they know if they are alive or dead?

I do not wish for immortality, and even with mortality, I prefer living my life as a human — call it heroic self-indulgence (and oni no onii-chan probably would), but what would it feel to hear that line as a true immortal like that kid?

How cruel.

How insulting it must be to hear.

‘Kyaaaaaaaaaaaa!’

As my mind was bogged down in such frivolous minutiae, I heard Araragi Tsukihi’s shriek — why does this kid only sound like a cute girl when she shrieks, I thought as I looked up.

I may have said we have overcome the biggest hurdle, but there was one remaining uncertainty — I do not know how people not in the field would react upon seeing this monster slug.

It’s an oddity people in the field would like, so Oshino no onii-chan or Kaiki no onii-chan would probably enjoy it, but a slug is a slug, and although not too frightening, a girl’s first reaction would be ‘how disgusting’, and might be let down by its appearance — which is something I worried about slightly, but it appears there was no need for that.

Normally, you need at least some technique in order to see oddities. If Araragi Tsukihi cannot see the monster after sprinkling salt and having it show up, then all this effort would have been meaningless, which is why I took special attention to not only put it on paper, but to have Sengoku Nadeko put it on paper.

The illustration materialising from the sand all of a sudden was to be my masterstroke in this story's climax… but, how do I put this…

It materialised all right, but it also expanded.

Sengoku's otherwise very moe slug shot out of the sandpit, its length in dozens of metres.

A simple, slimy design like a slug can look cute from a certain perspective, but if it's that big, it will incite humanly fears. Any person would scream at the sight of this, let alone Araragi Tsukihi.

They'll shirk, and lose the ability to think —

Humans would.

But this is me.

My surprise, my fears have been severed from my actions, my emotions do not affect them at all; if that was not the case, I would probably be swallowed up by its mass.

'"un—'

I made no changes to my plan, and flew towards its body.

Araragi Tsukihi froze upon the shocking sight unfolding in front of her. One could say this was a happy miscalculation — her not getting in the way was a big help.

However, the original plan called for a wagon-sized monster; how did we end up with a Slug Tofu that rivals apartment blocks?

It's simple: Sengoku Nadeko.

I asked her laxly to draw something that looks like a slug, but no

matter what she drew, she did spend some time as a deity, meaning I should not have asked her to. Sadly, this was also my mistake.

Meticulously drawing the background like a manga, instead of making it realistic, causes an error in perspective when the paper gets converted into three dimensions, making the slug larger. This also speaks to Sengoku Nadeko's illustration skills — while it is too early to tell, she might accidentally make it as a manga artist.

Or a specialist.

'"limited—'

Should've went for Araragi Karen's bee, I thought, but I do not regret this turn of events. If anything, I feel glad that all Kaiki no onii-chan did was give her a slug.

A slug can be gigantic, but even so, it is only gigantic.

I can handle this — with only a finger, even.

'— "rulebook".'

Like a skewer sticking through a marshmallow, I skewered through the Slug Tofu with my finger — the greatly enlarged slug, smashed through by my greatly fattened finger.

It disintegrated with little resistance.

The remains of the slug scattered all over the park — a rather grotesque sight, and the product of a few accidents, but everything did go according to plan.

As slug bits rained down all over, I spoke to the still-stiff Araragi Tsukihi.

'Thank you. The hidden monster is defeated all thanks to you.'

I said.

A word of gratitude as insincere as this is probably never heard of. Then again, I am a corpse; don't expect me to have stellar acting

chops.

Moving on, I wanted to finish this as soon as I can — but I really shouldn't as a pro; more haste, less speed.

I have constantly failed, no, misjudged from the start, and the biggest mistake to date is being too hasty to end it all, without tidying up — I should maintain my battle mode as long as a slug piece is still in the air.

Strange. This has never happened before.

What's happened to me?

'Ononoki-chan! Behind you!'

Araragi Tsukihi, who has frozen still up until this point, finally spoke a line. This made me reflexively (which is unusual, considering I'm dead) turn around. But I missed it by fractions of a second.

Behind me was a giant Slug Tofu.

Returned to its original size and state.

A real existence existing in reality.

No, wait a second, slugs are not that kind of organism, right? They are not planarians; they may look similar, but that's it, they don't regenerate, right?

But in the end, to think that oddities can be 'that kind of organism' is a thought dumber than even an outsider's — a slug is a slug, but the thing on that paper is a Slug Tofu.

I realised.

Its slimy surface seemingly focussed its aim and shot out flames. One cannot conceive of it as a biological creature, let alone a slug, but only as a beast, a being with monstrous attacks — that was what I realised.

No, I could dodge it if I wanted to.

But with Araragi Tsukihi behind me, I couldn't — Araragi Tsukihi may be the shide no tori, and would live even bathed in the slug's flames, but if she finds out what she is from that, then it would spell bad news for me.

Instead of that, I shall be her firewall. I think that sounds cool. Cool as it may sound, though, as I said earlier, I am a corpse who is weak against fire, and as I also said earlier, I am drenched in salad oil.

Speaking of being burnt, it was like a small campfire — in an instant, the flames engulfed my entire body.

'O-Ononoki-chan!'

Araragi Tsukihi screamed as I jumped backwards to avoid hurting her. Worry not, despite my constant miscalculations, regret is another thing split apart from my actions.

Even with an unavoidable mistake, one can always then correct it, such is my strong suit — unhampered by failure. Anyway, I rolled on the ground, trying to put the fire out.

Not just any roll, but an ultra-high-speed roll assisted by occasional uses of my "unlimited rulebook". Whilst not exactly dignified, in a moment like that, dignity was the least of my concerns.

This is not the time to act cool, I might genuinely go to the afterlife just because of this stupid thing — what is it with this feeling that nothing is going to plan?

This was, of course, also my mistake.

The Slug Tofu is something beyond my expertise, yet I fought it on equal terms — that was my misstep. The last thing I expected it to do was to shoot flames.

Simply put, in order to make it pop out visually, Sengoku Nadeko added flame patterns as screentones to that slug (why would she waste her skills on something like this…?), but even without that, I have no idea about the lore behind the Slug Tofu.

Slugs and flames; so that's it…

Aside from throwing salt at it, another method from olden times to defeat it was to burn incense, back when salt was expensive; maybe that was where it came from? Or could the key be tofu, like yaki-tofu, or yudofu… [9]

If that's the case, then this aberration is more ferocious than I thought, and completely incompatible for me — immune to physical attacks, and itself attacks using flames; if anything, this aberration was born to deal with a monster like myself.

Considering that this artificial aberration was a product of Kaiki no onii-chan, that might really be the case… nothing out of the ordinary for that swindler to have a trick against me up his sleeve.

Yes, nothing out of the ordinary.

To have everything not go to plan, to be in this state of defeat, without anything weird happening to you — to change nothing despite throwing everything at it, this is exactly like oni no onii-chan or Sengoku Nadeko's troubles, isn't it?

Does this happen to everyone who ever crosses paths with Araragi Tsukihi?

Anyway, even with me saying that, I cannot give up — be it incompatibility or a nemesis, I am obliged to clean up my own messes.

Even as I am left with burns all over, the flames were finally extinguished, and I immediately went for the slug's massive body — was what I originally had in mind, but when I turned my head around, the interdimensional monster had already vanished.

Eh?

Oi, oi.

What happened in the small amount of time I spent rolling to have made that mega-size slug disappear? It should be large enough to appear in my sight no matter what.

There was only one answer.

I knew it straight away — above me.

I looked up, and over the park, that tender slug was high up in the sky, so high that it looked pretty tiny. I have no idea how it jumped up there, but it seems it is going for the most primitive body attack — crushing me with its weight.

Body attacks are fine, but if it shoots flames to boot, there's nothing else I can do. If I am burnt whilst pinned down, I am really done for.

To be done for without even doing anything is the last possible outcome I want — so I dodged.

As many times as I have embarrassed myself, a clumsy, ill-thought-out body attack from top to bottom is something even a disgrace like Ononoki Yotsugi could dodge from.

It'd be a fabulous dodge, followed by a counterattack.

Luckily, I have a plan. I held in my hand the salt bottle Araragi Tsukihi gave me. Although I was not planning on using it, given that my opponent is a slug, no matter the size, salt will still work.

Onee-chan would probably hate underhanded solutions like this (if I have to say it, this is more Oshino no onii-chan's approach), but to not cling stubbornly to my identity, to adapt and improvise tactics when things go awry, those are precisely my streng—

'*Watch out, Ononoki-chan!*'

I got hit.

As I was concentrating on what was above me, planning a counter, and waiting for that timing, I was hit from the side by Araragi Tsukihi — with my centre of gravity concentrated on a single foot, even a girl's weak push could set me off-balance. I rolled on the ground several times once again.

No, what happened to me was not important.

Either way, I am outside of the slug's landing zone, so I'm fine — which means the one who bumped me off, Araragi Tsukihi, is completely in that landing zone.

Right at the last possible moment.

You idiot. Having been scared stiff by that monster so far, why only move at the moment you're least supposed to?

I did not even have the chance to say that to her.

Araragi Tsukihi's tiny body was crushed by that giant slug.

Probably not into a sheet like in comics — I cannot imagine what inhuman horror would come from being crushed under such a giant being.

To be crushed by a slug, to be crushed by a tofu, what would a human look like? Do you actually die like when you hit your head on the corner of a tofu block? [10]

Of course, Araragi Tsukihi's act of self-sacrifice came without her own plan of self-defence. As always, it was a rash decision.

Without knowing I was a corpse.

Without knowing she was immortal herself.

She gave her life like it was the natural thing to do.

'…Just like Araragi Koyomi.'

But this makes things tricky.

More than tricky; the worst has happened.

The reason I say that is because when I was knocked off, the salt I had in my hand had also gone. The ace up my sleeve was now buried under the slug, somewhere in the great depths, alongside Araragi Tsukihi.

You have got to be kidding me.

Araragi Tsukihi's every move was done because she thought it was the right thing to do. And every move of hers backfired against her.

How could a person doing what they think is the right thing backfire *this* consistently?

No, not as a human — as an undying bird.

Without the danger that comes with mortality, there is no sense of danger. Without a sense of danger, normally avoidable disasters and incidents will come, one after the other. Instead of saying she's a bringer of plagues, it might be more apt to describe Araragi Tsukihi as an air pocket — no, now's not the time for surveying.

To start analysing in such dire circumstances is no different from escaping reality — I must devise a way to finish off the Slug Tofu. I adjusted my mindset.

But, even with an adjusted mindset, it is also separate from my actions — or should I say, with my calm analysis, I have 'nowhere to go'.

Not from reality, nor from what's in front of me.

Not because I cannot leave a pulverised Araragi Tsukihi here. Nothing humanitarian like that. To sever this mindset, to stop traipsing, to let the truth out at all costs, and to seek help from oni no onii-chan, *that's* what should be done by the bloodless corpse, as inferred from the manual — but all that is beyond me, for the fire has done some serious damage.

Serious and deep burns all over me.

This body, already dead, was also partially rotten — now there is no way I can use the rapidly-fattening "unlimited rulebook".

I cannot even move quickly, let alone attack quickly — that shove from Araragi Tsukihi was the nail in the coffin.

In face of this burning, giant slug, I have nowhere I can go, and nothing I can do. Nothing hands-on — nothing fingers-on.

…Eh, whatever.

Nothing I can do, but whatever.

The writing is on the wall.

Never in my worst nightmares have I dreamt of meeting my maker in such an erratic fashion, but I have already severed even this self-torment from me.

I have done the last thing a pro should do — break confidentiality — though to be honest, this is not the worst possible ending. Even with things like this, even as she has been ground into dust, Araragi Tsukihi is not dead, and will not die. Even if the dust causes a dust explosion and burns every bit of her away, she will not die. She is immortal, and therefore she will not shuffle from any mortal coil — she will just leisurely stroll back into life amidst the flames.

My mistakes will not result in the disappearance of our subject of study; this is the lowest bar of a professional's risk management. Gaen-san, who can sense my burns, will soon rid the world of this rampaging Slug Tofu.

As a corpse, I have nothing to lose.

As a spy, I have done the least I could do.

With that judgement, I fully gave up — a calm, rational judgement, definitely not one from the heart.

It's not from my heart.

Well, well, well, how should I put this, it's a new discovery.

With my cold judgement, observing my cold heart, I found something intriguing, something interesting; something deserving of laughter — bitter laughter, that is.

For a corpse who is long dead, to still resist death, to still find it petrifying —

Then.

Right then — *patan!*

It folded.

Not the slug, but space itself.

It is the only explanation I could muster. The Slug Tofu that had been transformed slammed shut with a ‘patan’, from both ends down the middle.

The three-dimensional styling is, in the end, a two-dimensional pictogram, an illusion one would trick a child with, and like its unceremonious unravelling, the slug disappeared into thin air — no matter how much salt I could hose at it, the slug only loses moisture and shrinks, and wouldn’t disappear so cleanly — what’s going on?

But in actuality, the Slug Tofu is truly gone.

No signs, no foreshadowing.

The only thing left is the thing crushed by the monster’s weight, the being that has mixed with the ground, the remains of Araragi Tsukihi — an annoying sight.

An unfathomable turn of events, an unjudgeable phenomenon; as I was busy being confused, I heard a voice from the sandpit.

‘This isn’t like you, Ononoki-chan.’

I turned over to its source — there it is.

I saw a god.

This town’s goddess — the new god.

With twin ponytails and a rucksack, looking like a right little girl — her name is Hachikuji Mayoi.

Mayoi nee-san.

‘No matter what you do to it in three dimensions, it’s not its main body — you should strike it in two dimensions.’

The little girl said; she held in her hand a neatly folded sheet of manga genkō yōshi, presumably dug out from the sand.

The lovely illustration of a slug from the destined-to-be-famous manga artist is gone, once it got folded — covered.

Sealed.

‘……’

I see.

Even as it materialised, it was still a sheet of paper. It turns out Araragi Tsukihi was not the one blinded by the magical girl of justice setting, but myself.

How have I not thought of… something so simple?

I remained agape, as Mayoi nee-san perked up her chest.

‘Hu, hu, hu. It appears you were attempting to do this in secret, but unfortunately for you, I am the goddess who looks over this town, and I get around — anytime, anywhere.’

‘Anywhere’ is probably an embellishment.

Oh yeah, I only thought of it just now, but when you think about it, settling on this park as the stage was also the wrong choice — for this park is also closely connected to the snake-worshipping Kitashirahebi Shrine.

A barrier was a waste of time.

If I wanted to do this behind Mayoi nee-san’s back, not only would I have to avoid her residence in Kitashirahebi Shrine, but by extension, this park too — however, it was also this failure that saved me.

‘I didn’t want to interfere with the pros, but with the town in

danger and my friend in a pinch, I couldn't just stand by and watch. So, I did what little I can to help — which means,'

The snail and the snake, Hachikuji Mayoi, folded the sealed slug ever smaller, as she gave a majestic smile, cheekily saying something resembling her catchphrase.

'Sorry, a slip of the hand.'

007

Satisfied at maybe her line, or maybe at her excellent work, Mayoi nee-san promised not to tell oni no onii-chan about this, and returned to the mountains — putting that folded sheet into her rucksack.

Wouldn't it have been better to tear up that sheet, I thought, but for the snail goddess, the slug can perhaps be considered her kin — with her having so many friends as oddities, she probably thinks it wiser to treat not only the humans well, but the aberrations, too.

Besides, it would be a pity if Sengoku Nadeko's painstakingly-illustrated slug was torn to shreds, and it was Mayoi nee-san who did all the work; all I have done so far is fail over and over, the last thing I should do is grumble.

My bad for saying you were inflexible.

Turns out you can be plenty flexible. As expected of a mollusc.

It goes without saying that the pulverised Araragi Tsukihi recovered whilst I was discussing with Mayoi nee-san on how to clean things up — her naginata hakama was torn and muddied, but the skin and flesh underneath it was free from any blemishes.

Sleeping soundily, too.

Were I an ordinary expert, I would probably be touched by her self-sacrifice, and be more lenient in my surveillance, but for me, gratitude or owing people one are things that do not affect any of my future work.

Or should I say, I'm still fuming.

Because when you think about it, the reason why I burnt more brightly was because that bastard threw salad oil at me, and upon further analysis, one would conclude that things escalated to where they were not purely down to my mistakes.

Attempts to salvage the situation only made it worse — when one thinks about it, one realises the moment Araragi Tsukihi got flattened and lost consciousness was a *deus ex machina* moment — anyone could see what caused all this.

Anyone could see *who* caused all this. The amount of evidence is such that some experts would classify the shide no tori as a dangerous entity from this incident alone, and send in a task force for its neutralisation.

The biggest prey since Kissshot Acerolaorion Heartunderblade at her full strength, a phoenix-level prey. [11]

But these things I did not report to Gaen-san, for good reason — obviously, I did not want to add insult to my embarrassments as a professional, but more importantly, I have confirmed a new discovery about the shide no tori, which for me, is the real reason.

In any case, I took Araragi Tsukihi back to the Araragi household whilst she was sleeping, and spent the rest of the night fixing these burns on my embalmed corpse, with a glimmer of hope that she would treat all that happened as a dream, me returning to the subject's room disguised as a plush. The next day, Araragi Tsukihi not only treated what happened as a dream — she forgot every part of it.

As before, I was a to-scale plush to her, and from her attitude, *I* seemed to be the one who thought of yesterday as a dream, which is quite inconceivable.

Previously, when I obliterated Araragi Tsukihi's top half, the reason she did not remember was because her mind had no time to process my attack, and the reason she lost her memories of that moment was because it never entered her short-term memory; such was the accepted explanation.

But this time, Araragi Tsukihi had lost not only her short-term memory, but the memory for almost the entire day — an almost ideally cut montage where the animated plush, the magical girl of justice, the giant slug and the pulverisation were deleted from her recollections. This cannot be explained simply with 'forgetting due

to shock from death'.

It is a mysteriously selective amnesia.

However, were one to ignore the chaos, and analyse from a pro's perspective, this memory loss has a simple explanation. Instead of 'forgetting due to shock from death', it is 'forgetting the shock of death'.

The two are not the same thing.

Bodily injury and inner injury — that would be an appropriate metaphor, like how one can see a broken body, but not a broken heart.

A broken heart — that is, psychological trauma.

But this is more than a metaphor; different doctors exist to treat these different wounds. Bodily injury and mental damage are not that different after all.

Memories of past abuse reappearing in occasional flashbacks and affecting one's life in future is a symptom common throughout every age in history — the past becoming an aftereffect, planting itself deeply into one's core, making life a more difficult path to walk.

This feeling of 'suffering' can even drive people to suicide, and that is no exaggeration — a broken heart can prove fatal.

That's why.

That's why these wounds — they must be healed.

Yes, the shide no tori.

The eternal aberration, the phoenix, can heal even its non-bodily injuries — any memory that threatens to interfere with it living is removed, without a single trace.

The animated plush, the magical girl of justice, the giant slug, the pulverisation — for such out of the blue, fanciful, and ridiculous

memories to stay would prove problematic to its existence in future.

Therefore, beyond a certain limit of acceptance, the brain cells that marked these anomalous memories would reset, and return to a blank slate. An ability to magically remove bad memories — or, to put it better, a self-defensive ability to automatically seal off psychological trauma.

In reality, in this town, there is also another erratic genius who can force off memories they dislike onto somebody else — there is also an erratic oddball who could stick their finger into their brains, modifying their memory as they wish.

This abnormal act of self-cleansing, when utilised to its fullest, has allowed Araragi Tsukihi to remain the lively figure she is. It is this liveliness that also ensures Araragi Tsukihi never learns and never grows.

These failures, these dangers are doomed to repeat themselves, all around them, gradually accumulating.

Piling up, welling up — kindling for a new flame.

The brightly burning, undying bird.

In the centre of the flames, those mistakes and failures turn into dust, its ashes taking off without leaving a trace, continuing its life from the very beginning.

…It's horrifying. Horrifying, yet fascinating. Fascinating, with deep implications.

At least during this time of suspended sentencing, one should observe her using this never-before-considered point of view. She has at the very least an academic value.

With it, I also consider myself lucky that she has neatly forgotten all my failings, so I decided against reporting this to my superiors.

A decision such as this could be a sign of Araragi Tsukihi's influence — the reason why I did that might be due to the shide no tori's self-defensive abilities.

But anyway, I'll let her live to see another day.

The observation continues.

This unknown life form has, however little, unveiled its mysterious self, so I'll continue observing and protecting this natural wonder.

And so, to avoid making the same missteps, I decided to empty the lolicon's ice cream stock as soon as possible — once confirming the subject has well and truly set off for school, I sneakily retrieved the cups of ice cream from the freezer, placed them on the bed, and enjoyed all five flavours in order.

'Ah, aah! I didn't feel like going to school for some reason so I did a U-turn and went back home and my plush is eating ice cream!?'

Returning to her room, Araragi Tsukihi screamed, just like yesterday.

…Magical girl of justice, part II.

She never learns and never grows — but that's okay. I swear on my life I'm not failing next time.

Afterword

They say there is a fine line between fools and geniuses, and one would be inclined to agree, but once you apply common sense to it, it becomes apparent that fools and geniuses cannot be any more different. I can't help but say that there's nothing more important in this world than common sense. But if one does not apply common sense, then that 'fine line' might refer not to the fools or geniuses themselves, but the treatment they get. History is chock full of geniuses misunderstood as fools by the people around them; the reverse is also true. I guess a genius can't be a genius until people start treating them as one, but a fool could be a genius as long as people believe them to be one? Well, if we don't talk about geniuses by description or fools by comparison, but judge them by their existences, then this cannot be absolute, but relative; the key premise being 'belonging in a minority', with one commonality between them a disadvantaged status in their groups. Then, the one thing a genius needs is 'the talent to be understood'. To not be crushed beneath incomprehensibility or misunderstandings, to receive support… more plainly, the talent of attaining sponsorship? In that sense, the idea of geniuses living and using their talents their way doesn't really exist, because in reality, their life is lived for 'everybody's appeasement' until the very end. As for the fools, perhaps they try their damndest to not be understood, acting more mysterious than they make out to be, disguising themselves as the real deal. If that is so, then there is a fine line between a fool and a genius; either way, it's all thanks to everybody supporting them (joke intended).

Anyway, this book is a collection of tales with three foolish girls as the main characters. Oikura Sodachi, Kanbaru Suruga, Araragi Tsukihi. These three people, all possessing their own foolishness, all showing their foolishness in their own way; I wish everybody takes their light failures with heavy hearts. Ah, I could've only written this after I have finished the series, a compilation of chapter zeroes, but whether it's the unyielding Oikura, the undeterred Kanbaru, or the undying Tsukihi, if it's reviewed well, I might start writing a chapter one. Some say the line dividing geniuses and fools is 'the talent of persistence', but I think what really matters is 'the talent of

persistence in face of talentlessness', and this is something all three of them have. This book is composed one hundred percent of stories I continued as a hobby, *Monogatari*'s Off Season, '*Orokamonogatari* — Chapter Zero: Sodachi Fiasco, Chapter Zero: Suruga Bonehead, Chapter Zero: Tsukihi Undo'. [12] Oh, and, I said they were a collection of chapter zeroes just now, but 'collection' is probably too strong a way of putting it.

The cover depicts the (for the author) rapidly-rising-in-popularity Ononoki Yotsugi-chan, illustrated by VOFAN-san. She gets put through the most in this book, so I'm really overjoyed to see her drawn so cutely. I would also like to thank Kodansha Novels for letting me continue the *Monogatari* series after its conclusion. The anime adaptation is also hitting its stride, and I ask for your continued support.

NISIOISIN

Notes and glossary

[1] magical girl: *mahou shoujo*; for more information, watch *Pretty Cure*.

[2] ‘Real brother’ (実兄) and ‘sentence’ (実刑) are both pronounced *jikkei*.

[3] *genkō yōshi*: manuscript paper.

[4] A pun: ‘rookie(s)’ (新人) and ‘new god(s)’ (新神) are both pronounced *shinjin*.

[5] *hakama*: a traditional Japanese dress worn over a kimono; tied at the waist, falls approximately to the ankles.

[6] *kyūdō*: a Japanese martial art, based on archery.

[7] *chadō*: tea ceremony and related practices.

[8] *naginata*: a Japanese pole weapon, similar to a glaive, now commonly associated with women.

[9] Yaki-tofu: broiled/grilled tofu; yudofu: hot tofu — essentially, tofu in broth

[10] Idiomatic expression. Similar to ‘go take a long walk off a short cliff’.

[11] ‘Great prey’ (大捕物) and ‘phoenix entity’ (鳳物) are both pronounced *ōtorimono*.

[12] Despite Nisio writing that the three chapters are ‘chapter zeroes’, the first edition (October 2015) which I am translating from lists the chapters as ‘one’, ‘two’ and ‘three’. I have chosen to keep the error(s) (either on the author’s or the publisher’s part) as they appear.

Additional translator's notes

[A] *I/me/mine*

Ononoki still uses 僕 (*boku*) (first-person masculine singular) when narrating in the first person.

[B] *Oni no onii-chan (abbr. oni-i-chan)*

Also variously translated as 'kind monster sir', 'monstieur', 'demon brother'… much as transliteration is frowned upon in translation, this is one of the few frequently-recurring puns that, in my mind, has (a) never been translated satisfactorily into English, (b) flows better in its original form, and/or (c) is understandable by its main audience even in its untranslated form. The same reasoning also goes for some of the words in the glossary above.

Oni (鬼, demon/monster) comes from the *ki* (鬼) in *kyuketsuki* (吸血鬼, vampire), meaning *oni* doesn't exactly refer to monsters in general, but is Ononoki's shorthand for vampires. *Onii-chan* can refer to elder males in general, not only brothers; Ononoki uses it for Oshino and Kaiki too, which I have also preserved in this translation (and otherwise would've been 'Mister Oshino/Kaiki').

Given the above, let it be known that I would have anglicised it as 'Mister Vampy', or 'Vampsire' for short. But there's no point in inflicting upon this small world *another* inevitably botched translation attempt.

[C] *'Salad oil'?* (002)

A generic term for cooking oils that are liquid in room temperature, and can therefore be used as salad dressing. This can include rapeseed, sunflower, cottonseed, corn, rice bran, peanut, soybean, sesame etc. Excludes olive oil or mixed oils. The difference from 'vegetable oil' is subtle, but still there, so I decided against changing

to that more familiar term.

[D] *Hienma Oshichi* (002)

A reference to two things: the **Hienma** from *Ehon Hyaku Monogatari* ('A Hundred Tales Illustrated') (1841), a siren-like figure whose seductive beauty sucks away the blood and vitality of lecherous men who approach her; also known as the *hi no enma* ('yama of fire') due to being born in the year of the Fire Horse (丙午) (*hinoe uma*) (related to the Chinese zodiac, but repeats every sixty years instead of twelve) — itself born from a superstition that women born those years would bring bad luck to their future spouse, accelerated by the popular tale (see e.g. Ihara Saikaku's *Five Women Who Loved Love* (1686)) of Yaoya **Oshichi**: a young woman who took refuge in a temple during a fire, fell in love with one of the temple boys, later committing arson in an attempt to reunite with him, before being executed by burning at the stake in 1683.

Also a potential reference to Hienma Oshichi in the fantasy manga *Ashiaraiyashiki no Juunin-tachi* (2001–2013), based also on the Hienma figure, whose abilities match more with Kissshot Acerolaorion Heartunderblade than the rest of the *Monogatari* cast, although it is worth noting the 'o' in 'Oshichi' is given in kanji, whereas this book gives 'o' in hiragana (same as Yaoya Oshichi), making the latter theory less likely.

[E] *I/me/mine 2* (004)

Sengoku uses 私 (*watashi*) (first-person neuter singular, formal), no longer referring to herself in the third person. Her pauses are deliberate.

[F] *Profanity* (005)

I have largely followed the Japanese quirk of having very little curse words, but this is one semi-exception. The original sentence

can be more accurately translated as ‘are you seriously finding the time to paste screentones?’; however, Ononoki uses the rude てめえ (*temee*) to refer to Sengoku, which is too good to throw away, so this is one of the very few cases where I prioritised tone over literal accuracy.

The snark does not end there. Ononoki uses あいつ (*aitsu*) and こいつ (*koitsu*) (informal to rude versions of ‘this person’) about a quarter of the time for Tsukihi, not to mention the verbal slip later on; see note [I]. A lot of this is inevitably lost in translation for the sake of flow.

[G] *61 screentone* (005)

Screentones are adhesive sheets with printed patterns, used to create colour and texture (e.g. hair, backgrounds, shades) in comics and manga. If you have ever printed grey colours, it’s the same thing: the grey is achieved not by having actual grey ink/toner, but by microscopic black dots, spaced such that it gives an overall grey colour. This is also how colour mixing in colour printers work.

The number refers to two things: the first digit being *dot density* in 10 × lines per inch (lpi/L); the second digit being *overall colour* relative to CMYK. In this case, ‘61’ means a density of 60L, at 10% K. Refer also to this visual guide (external link).

[H] *The name of the arena* (006)

The book does not give its pronunciation. It could even be ‘shirohebi’, though whether Ononoki is privy to that knowledge is another matter.

[I] *You’d better* (006)

Here, Ononoki switches from the informal お前 (*omae*) to the more polite きみ (*kimi*) when talking to Tsukihi. Both mean ‘you’.

Compare with German „du“/„Sie“.

[J] *The very last sentence* (006)

The original reads 「失礼。一枚、噛みました」 (*Shitsurei. Ichimai, kamimashita*). Whereas *kamimashita* alone means ‘stuttered’, *ichimai kamimashita* means ‘took part’. It helps that all official novel translations have used ‘a slip of the tongue’.